

HK-Argentina

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# memorandum

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DATE: May 2, 1979

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: POL - F. A. Harris

SUBJECT: THE ABDUCTION, INTERROGATION, "INTERMEDIATE PHASING" AND  
RELEASE OF A PRISONER

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

The following is taken from the notes of Mr. Richard Boudreaux, News Editor of the Buenos Aires Bureau of the Associated Press. It recounts the experiences of Mr. Abel de Leon, one of the several people abducted during March-April 1978 raids on a neighborhood in San Justo, a suburb of Buenos Aires (see Buenos Aires 2589 dated April 6, 1978). Both Mr. de Leon's and Mr. Boudreaux's confidence must be respected. Mr. Boudreaux's notes derived from a "San Justo Follow-Up" story on which he is working.

Mr. de Leon is 26 years old, and the brother-in-law of a PCR political activist. He has a wife and three children (a boy 8, a girl 7, and a 1-year old infant). Prior to his abduction he headed a neighborhood commission to improve public services in an apartment complex in Buenos Aires Province. He was not a member of the PCR (which is banned by the military government), and had nothing to do with the guerrillas.

Prior to his abduction and since his release, Mr. de Leon has managed a men's clothing store in Buenos Aires, working 12 hours a day.

On April 8, 1978 he and his wife were picked up from the home of a relative by a group of 15 to 20 armed men who said they were from the Army. They were blindfolded, handcuffed and taken away in a truck for a half hour ride to an undisclosed detention center. Mrs. de Leon was released the next day.

Mr. de Leon was detained in what appeared to be a converted house containing tiny jail cells with metal doors. He was held in a cell 1x2x4 meters large, which he shared at times with as many as three other people. He was blindfolded most of the time. There were 22 to 23 people held in the detention facility when he arrived there, three when he left. Some had been there since the coup in 1976.

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Inmates communicated through a code developed over the months, which consisted of raps on the wall. The code was used to announce when a prisoner came and when one left. They could tell the time of day because guards changed at 7 am and 7 pm.

"I was tortured for more than an hour the first day. They had me blindfolded, naked and bound hand and foot. They burned me with the picana all over--on my tongue, on my testicles, arms, legs, and especially on my head (pointed to temples). They asked me some questions about my brother-in-law, my political affiliation and whether I knew anything about truckloads of arms captured from the military. I answered all their questions but they kept jabbing me with the picana. I don't think it was so much a tool for interrogation as for sadism. One of my torturers explained they were getting even with me because I managed to hide from them for so long.

"For twelve days they gave me nothing but water. On the thirteenth day they started giving me 'mate cocido' in the morning, and 'polenta de maiz con mondonga descompuesto' (tripe and corn soup) in the afternoon. We also received two pieces of bread a day." The guard gave him a cigarette some days.

"I thought I would die of hunger. Then when they started feeding me I knew I would be released eventually. Everytime somebody was taken away the guards claimed they were going to be executed. But I knew that if they killed me they would have to kill at least five million Argentines who were just as innocent. And if they did that it would have been not for anything I did but for an idea someone had in his head.

"I left the cell only to go to the bathroom. Everytime I did I was blindfolded and had to run a gauntlet of guys beating me with their fists. At night our captors would have parties until 3 or 4 in the morning, sometimes with women. They would get drunk and afterwards come into our cells and beat us with their fists. Sometimes my blindfold came off and I could see their faces. Some of them had dilated eyes and must have been drug addicts."

There was a large 5x4 meter cell near the bathroom. The guards boasted that prisoners were killed there.

During the last fifteen days of his detention at the secret center, conditions eased: Mr. de leon was allowed to shave sometimes, received cigarettes, had his clothes washed by another inmate, was allowed to leave his cell to wash floors in

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the hall, and listened to world cup soccer games on a radio one of the guards put outside the cell. The guards watched the games on television in another room.

He was treated with leniency having gotten on speaking terms with one of three guards he was assigned to. The guards were called "Teta," "King Kong," and "Spider." He got to know King Kong, who was Paraguayan born, and a self-professed Peronist. "King Kong talked about what a shame it was Argentina had come to this. He talked about how hard it was to have a family and go home everyday and live among them without their knowing what he did. He never admitted to being a killer and told me he didn't agree with the brutality inflicted on political suspects. But he said, 'I have seen many people killed. Once you start executing prisoners it's hard to stop. It's like being a drug addict.'"

During the first month Mr. de Leon was detained with "Barberan," "Rolon," and Estanislao Araujo. The latter two were freed and Aureliano Araujo was placed in his cell. Araujo said he had been tortured for seventeen hours with a pimana. His head was swollen. He was allowed to leave Argentina for Holland under UNHCR auspices in July, two months after his wife had left. In a nearby cell were Liwski, G. Gernandez and Heumann. Liwski had been shot once in each leg.

On July 3, 1978, he was taken to the Comisaria de la Fereira. At the center he was led blindfolded upstairs, where his personal data and photos were taken, and then put into a car. He was told by a police official that nothing would happen to him in La Fereira if he behaved.

In La Fereira he was detained in a 2x2 cell with seven other persons, including three doctors, Araujo and Petruch. Barberan arrived a month later. Barberan was sentenced to two years by the "Consejo Militar" and is now in Villa Devoto Prison. Araujo was expelled. The three doctors and Petruch are before the "Justicia Federal" on charges of illegal association (belonging to the banned PCR). They were placed under PEN detention after being cleared by the consejo militar.

In August Mr. de Leon was transferred to Villa Devoto Prison and made three appearances before the military courts ("juzgado 32") at Campo de Mayo. The Lt. Col. "Juez de Instrucción" told him during the first hearing that testimony taken under torture would not be held against him. He was shown a stack of written testimony. He was asked the same questions as those asked

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during his interrogation. During the second hearing the same questions were asked by the military prosecutor. At the third hearing before a "Consejo de Guerra" (composed of ten officers), he had a court-appointed lawyer. He was again asked the same questions and what he thought of the Beagle dispute. He was found innocent and sent to La Plata on October 20, 1978 awaiting the President's agreement with the "consejo's" recommendation that he be taken off PEN and released. This occurred on December 7, 1978.

His wife knew he was in jail in July, but he did not appear under PEN until September. The Consejo gave him a "constancia" certifying that he was deprived of liberty from April 8 until October 20, 1978, for his employer, who took him back.

His wife was threatened with death and had her brother file a habeas corpus petition. A negative reply on the habeas corpus was given five times before he turned up in the police station. The judge then asked the police to free him. The police replied that he was held by the Army. The judge passed the habeas corpus to the appeals court, and the police again refused to release him. The matter went no further.

"I believed he was alive but I couldn't be sure," his wife said. A cousin took care of the children while she worked from 7 am until 11 pm in a doctor's office and as a maid. "People were afraid to associate with me. At the time there were a lot of armed men going through the apartment complex, and everybody was afraid. It was hard on the children. They isolated themselves from the other children at school. My son told me one day, 'when I grow up I'm going to make a bomb and kill all the policemen.' Now things are returning to normal. Our old friends are coming to visit. They want to know what happened, but many don't believe it."

Mr. de Leon believes that he is being followed by men in a red Ford Falcon, and he is afraid to talk to the IACHR.

CLEARANCES  
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POLCOUNS: WHHallman

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